

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

CPR-01 SAJ-01 ACDA-05 /075 W
----- 106266

R 291251Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9875

INFO USMISSION NATO

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY OSLO

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AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

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AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY BERLIN

USMISSION USBERLIN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, EC, FR, PINT

SUBJECT: THE POLITICAL EFFECTS OF NO MORE V-E DAYS IN
FRANCE

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REF: PARIS 11840

1. SUMMARY: GISCARD'S DECISION TO NO LONGER OFFICIALLY CELEBRATE V-E DAY IN FRANCE MAY WELL HAVE BEEN SHREWDLY TIMED TO ENHANCE HIS STATURE BOTH DOMESTICALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY. HOWEVER, HIS FAILURE TO CONSULT WITH KEY INTEREST GROUPS HERE AND ABROAD, COUPLED WITH HIS FAILURE TO FOLLOW UP HIS DECISION WITH A SUPPORTING SERIES OF PUBLIC STATEMENTS SO FAR HAS PRODUCED JUST THE OPPOSITE RESULT. NEVERTHELESS, GISCARD HAS NOW COME TO HIS OWN DEFENSE, AND WE EXPECT THAT THE LOUD DOMESTIC CRITICISM OF HIS DECISION WILL SLOWLY FADE, AND THAT THE FRENCH PEOPLE WILL ACCEPT HIS DECISION. THIS ESCAPADE SHOULD DEMONSTRATE TO GISCARD THE UTILITY OF CAREFUL PREPARATION AND THOROUGH FOLLOW-THROUGH ON HIS INITIATIVES, ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT CONFIDENT THAT HE WILL DRAW THIS CONCLUSION. END SUMMARY.

2. MOST OBSERVERS WERE SURPRISED BY THE WIDE-SPREAD OUT-CRY FROM FRENCH NATIONALISTS,'PATRIOTIC' GROUPS AND THE LEFT IN REACTION TO GISCARD'S DECISION TO FOREGO FUTURE OFFICIAL V-E DAY CELEBRATIONS IN FRANCE. IN RETROSPECT, IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT GISCARD DID NOTHING TO PREPARE POPULAR OR POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR HIS INITIATIVE. HIS DECISION -- WHICH SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN A SPUR-OF-THE-MOMENT AFFAIR AND NOT THE SUBJECT OF CONSULTATIONS BEYOND HIS INNER CIRCLE -- WAS NOT FOLLOWED UP BY A COHERENT ATTEMPT TO JUSTIFY IT TO THE NATION. GISCARD'S LONG SILENCE ON THE ISSUE SINCE THE ANNOUNCEMENT LEFT THE FIELD LARGELY TO HIS OPPONENTS. VETERANS' GROUPS FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY PROTESTED THE DECISION. THE PCF WAS QUICK TO ORGANIZE A WELL-PUBLICIZED IF SMALL PARADE ON PARIS' CHAMPS-ELYSEES WHICH SAW FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER MICHEL JOBERT JOIN COMMUNIST LABOR OFFICIALS IN PROTEST OVER THE DECISION. EVEN WITHIN HIS OWN MAJORITY, MANY GAULLIST (UDR) AND GISCARDIAN (RI) DEPUTIES HAVE TOLD THEIR PRESIDENT THAT THEY WILL LEAD CELEBRATIONS OF THE VICTORY IN THEIR CONSTITUENCIES NEXT MAY 8. A RECENT EXPRESS/SOFRES POLL SHOWED 48 PERCENT OF THE FRENCH DISAPPROVING THE DECISION AND ONLY 43 PERCENT SUPPORTING

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3. HAD GISCARD CONSULTED WITH HIS EC-NINE ALLIES AND
GOTTEN THEIR AGREEMENT TO ABANDON V-E DAY CELEBRATIONS
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THROUGHOUT THE EC NATIONS, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN MORE

DIFFICULT FOR THE DOMESTIC FRENCH OPPOSITION TO GATHER MOMENTUM. AS IT WAS, THE ONLY STRONG ENDORSEMENT HE GOT WAS FROM BONN -- WHICH PROBABLY HURT RATHER THAN HELPED GISCARD WITHIN FRANCE.

4. CONSEQUENTLY, WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN CALCULATED AS AN ACT OF STATESMANSHIP RAPIDLY TOOK ON THE APPEARANCE OF A DISPLAY OF POLITICAL INEPTITUDE: RATHER THAN SHOWING HIS DOMESTIC LEADERSHIP, GISCARD GAVE FURTHER EVIDENCE OF HIS TENDENCY TO RUN A ONE-MAN SHOW IN A NATION THAT REMAINS DEEPLY DIVIDED ON MANY ISSUES; RATHER THAN DEMONSTRATING A NEW UNIFYING "EUROPEANISM," HE PERMITTED FRANCE TO RECALL THE WIDESPREAD NATIONALISTIC AND ANTI-GERMAN FEELING THAT LURKS JUST BELOW THE SURFACE OF FRENCH SOCIETY. WHEN, ON MAY 21, HE GOT AROUND TO EXPLAINING HIS ACTION, HIS WORDS WERE ELOQUENT AND REASONABLE, BUT TWO WEEKS TOO LATE TO ERASE THE BAD TASTE THAT THIS AFFAIR CREATED.

5. NEVERTHELESS, GISCARD WILL PROBABLY GET AWAY WITH IT -- WITH NO ELECTIONS IN SIGHT AND NO HOPE OF GETTING A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CENSURE ON THE ISSUE, THE OPPOSITION AND MANY FRUSTRATED FRENCHMEN CAN ONLY GNASH THEIR TEETH, MAKE A FEW HEADLINES AND LET THE ISSUE DIE. EVEN HANDLED WITH SINGULAR LACK OF DEXTERITY, A PRESIDENT OF THE FIFTH REPUBLIC OF FRANCE CAN MAKE THIS SORT OF DECISION STICK. AS THE OPPONENTS TURN THEIR ATTENTION TO OTHER ISSUES, WE EXPECT THAT THE BULK OF FRENCHMEN WILL COME TO ACCEPT GISCARD'S DECISION. BUT A LITTLE CAREFUL PREPARATION BY GISCARD COULD HAVE EASED THIS TRANSITION.
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